Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. I planted Early Girl tomatoes early this summer. They look great and have grown to 5 ft. tall. They were blooming in August but now there are no blooms and no fruit has set. What is happening?

A. Early Girl is an indeterminate tomato and not a heat setter. When it bloomed earlier in the year it was too hot for it (or any tomato!) to set fruit. Now the Early Girl is doing its indeterminate “thing” and growing foliage. It may start blooming again and set some fruit later in the fall when temps cool. Meanwhile some of the recommended determinate heat-setters are setting fruit. Roma Surprise, BHN 968, Surefire, Lavaca, Tycoon, and Celebrity have begun to set fruit.

Q. Can you tell me what has happened to my lawn? It was beautiful all year. Between the rain and our once per week irrigation it is getting plenty of irrigation. Now however it has areas showing browning with dead foliage. The boundaries of the dead areas are growing.

A. Brown Patch has become a problem in many lawns. That is what the symptoms you describe sound like to me. Now that we have reached the autumn and the lawn has changed its growth habit to preparing for the winter rather than producing foliage, it is time to reduce irrigation. With all the rain we have had and all that is forecast you may not need to water again this fall. If you do water, only apply water in the morning so the grass blades are dry in the evening. The reduced irrigation may stop the spread of the brown patch, if not apply a lawn fungicide such as F-Stop or Bayleton. Follow label instructions. The fungus will stop spreading but may not heal until next spring.

Q. What is the butterfly that looks like a Monarch (orange color)? They are everywhere on the milkweed and mistflower? When will the Monarchs arrive for the fall?

A. You are probably seeing gulf fritillary butterflies. They lay their eggs on passion vine and are very common. I have seen one Monarch in the last week. They should be moving through before the end of the month and in October.

Q. Isn’t there a better way to eliminate live oak suckers than to cut them off with the string mower or lawn mower? It seems to be a never-ending task. What causes it?

A. Mowing or string mowing the suckers is the best action discovered so far. The tendency to produce the suckers is related to the genetics of individual trees. Some do it and some don’t. Trees that are growing in shallow or compacted soil also seem more inclined to produce the suckers. Sorry that I don’t have a better solution to offer.

Q. Everyone is talking about kale and its nutritional value. Is it difficult to grow and use?

A. Kale is easy to grow in the winter garden. Plant transplants 3ft apart in full sun in well-fertilized soil. Harvest the leaves as you need them. I like to mix kale with chard, beet greens other more mild tasting greens. Other gardeners add a leaf or 2 of frozen kale leaf to every smoothie they make.